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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, it turned out to be a pretty good week to take off. My wife and I usually take the week between Christmas and New Year's, but this year we both couldn't get the same time off, so we opted for this past week. We managed to get all of our holiday shopping started, and completed. I got more of the flooring done in the new rooms, but they haven't been finished yet as I had hoped. Maybe this weekend.

As most people know by now, I do not celebrate Christmas, being a non-Christian. However, my wife is, and does - so I share the non-religious segment of the holiday, as she does mine. It's the non-secular points of the holidays that I enjoy. Not so much the gift-giving (and receiving) although that is certainly enjoyable. But more, it's this time of the year in which some real goodness comes out of people - people helping out other people, in whatever manner that they choose. It's the getting together with friends and family; the exchange of holiday cards - especially with those whom you may not communicate with as much as you'd like; and a whole lot more. And yeah, there are the holiday parties.

With all due respect to Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol,', try to do something nice for someone that you don't know this holiday season. During your last-minute rush to get your shopping done, pick up a toy and donate it to your local Toys For Tots campaign. Make a donation to your local food pantry, homeless shelter, or Make-A-Wish foundation. Try to make someone else's holiday enjoyable, as you would like yours to be. And during all of your holiday cheer, remember not to drink and drive, or allow others to do the same.

Have a terrific holiday, whether it be Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, or Eid!

Until next time...

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Three Classic BASIC Game Books

The full text of a trilogy of classic computer books are now available at

AtariArchives.org: BASIC Computer Games (published 1978,) More BASIC Computer Games (1978), and Big Computer Games (1984.)

http://www.atariarchives.org/basicgames/
http://www.atariarchives.org/morebasicgames/
http://www.atariarchives.org/bigcomputergames/

Edited by David Ahl of Creative Computing Magazine, the books feature type-in BASIC games, including such classics as Animal, Blackbox, Eliza, Hammurabi, Lunar LEM Rocket, Mugwump, and Hunt the Wumpus. Big Computer Games also includes Rollercoaster, a unique computer-operated videodisc adventure game for the Apple][computer.

The two earlier books feature illustrations by George Beker, which will be instantly recognizable by anyone who read these books or Creative Computing magazine 20 or more years ago.

The books are available with the permission of David Ahl. With this announcement, AtariArchives.org has reached the milestone of making 25 classic computer books available on the Web.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho ho ho, friends and neighbors. Yep, it’s that time again... This is the last issue before Christmas. I’m not going to launch into a religious speech here, since there are many who don’t celebrate Christmas. But it IS a wonderful time of year; at least three of the world’s major religions consider it a special time. I’m not going to expound upon the other two because, to be quite honest, I don’t know enough about them. All I can really say is: Whatever you believe, believe in it now.

I thought for a moment about telling you my "Harry Chapin Story" again, but you’ve probably heard it already (I must have relayed that story half a dozen times here in this column, and I’ll not put you through it again this year... maybe next year though <grin>).

I would like to remind you that there are still people out there scratching just to make ends meet and are, for whatever reason, unable to provide the little special things that a lot of us take for granted... a big festive meal, a few small gifts for loved ones, things like that.

I’ll be dropping off a few food items at the local food-share again this year and a few toys in the ’Toys for Tots’ box. It’s not much... not enough to change anyone’s life... but it’s something. More than helping anyone else, I think it helps me. It ’grounds’ me. It reminds me that there are others less fortunate than I am. Boy, is that an understatement! I’ve been truly blessed. I really have. Even though I feel put-upon or unlucky or taken advantage of a dozen or so times a

day, I still have it better than a majority of people on this planet. And even if you leave the material things out of the equation, I've been blessed with friends and family. The things you can't buy are sometimes the hardest to obtain... and luckily, sometimes the hardest to get rid of. You remember the old saying "You can pick your friends but you can't pick your family"? Well, an old friend of mine from junior high school (I guess they call it 'middle school' these days) had his own version... "You! can pick your friends and you can pick your nose... but you can't pick your friend's nose".

Yeah, I know... it's gross. But it's one of the things that reminds me of him. I saw him a few months ago in a grocery store. We stood there in the store for several minutes making small-talk. Neither of us quite sure of where to start or what questions to NOT ask... "Are you still married"? "Did you ever finish that <whatever>" etc.... You know the kind of feeling.

But underneath all of our uncertainty of what time might have done to the other, there was the bond that had been formed all those years ago. It was really quite strange. There was a kind of duality that I haven't often encountered. On the one hand, here was an old friend. On the other hand, more time had passed since I had last seen him than we had had years under our belts when we were in school.

I finally decided that any time spent with old friends is time well spent. We've been in contact a couple of times since then, and each time we "catch up" a little more. Of course, we always end up interjecting at least a few memories of the old days, and that's cool, but the best part is just having contact.

Hmmm... I thought there might be a deep thought in that story somewhere, but there doesn't seem to be, does there?

Well, before I forget, please don't drink and drive during the holidays. Even if there aren't people depending on you, there might be people depending on the other guy.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available every week from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

John Garone asks about HD Driver caches:

"Regarding HDDriver FAT/Data cache settings is it normal for a setting of 100/100 to eat up 3.5 meg of RAM? It's 355k with 10/10."

Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells John:

"You can calculate this by multiplying the number of buffers (200 in your case) with the size of the biggest logical sector on your drive. So the memory needed depends on your partition sizes, and that's why it is impossible to give general recommendations on the best settings."

Guillaume D’flache chimes in with an observation:

"In my humble opinion this is not very intuitive for the average user, kB would be better!

So perhaps it could be calculated automatically by HD-Driver configuration program? One could set the cache size whether in kbytes (default) or in sectors, and a switch between the two units would be available. If a amount in kbytes (say 17kB) would not convert to an exact amount of (say 16k-large) sectors, an alert box would be displayed explaining that a rounding has occurred. Just a suggestion anyway!"

Uwe tells Guillaume:

"Too late. This is the way GEMDOS (the GEMDOS cache) works, so it cannot be changed. At least not without a completely new version of TOS ."

Kenneth Medin adds:

"I use 10/10 (which happens to be the default, not 100/100!) and it works well with 4 HD’s and a CD. Max partition size is 1 GByte.

Test with 10/10 and if you don’t get any performance loss keep it that way. If not increase the buffers. Quite simple, actually."

John now asks:

"How does the sector size get set for hard drive partitions? I see only choices under "Removable Media".

How does this set up look regarding efficiency and proper HDDriver configuration? You mentioned that the FAT/Data cache default is 100/100 That eats up almost 3.5meg RAM. Is 20/50 with 999 folders ok for proper driver usage?

Falcon, Tos 4.04, No Magic, etc.
Partition Info: 512 bytes per sect. 512 in root dir.
# of partitions: 12 + 2 CD drives = 14 total
Partition Sizes: 70meg to 994.9meg (all GEM)
General: 20/50/999 (RAM used: 1214 kb)
SCSI Driver: All but Link97 x’ed
Rem. Media: No x’s, min. part. = 1, Max sect. size = 16384, Actual = 16384
Devices and partitions: No IDE, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.7 "

Uwe replies:

"The sector size depends on the partition size, i.e. you cannot change it arbitrarily.

Looks as if it is only 10/10. I don’t know this by heart as I never change it anyway.

Note that most of this discussion will lead to nothing. The GEMDOS cache works as it works, it cannot be changed. Hard disk drivers have to stick to what GEMDOS provides."

Wayne Martz asks about boot resolutions on his CT60:

"I have a Falcon, CT60. The Falcon has no tv out port. It was working fine, but while playing with the CT60 config CPX, I tried to set the boot resolution higher. I must have hit the wrong button. I've been testing with 2 different monitors. One is a flat panel from my Dell that I was testing with, since it was easier to move back and forth. Booting in 060 mode on the flat panel, I briefly see the "Pretty" screen, then it goes black. I think the falcon is continuing to boot normally, since I hear the hd start after a typical amount of time for the ram check, or I hear the hd start as soon as I abort the ram check. Of course, I'm guessing, since I can't see anything. I never see the fuji, or the rest. So far, I'd only put on HDDriver, extendos and NVDI. I also have a normal 17 inch monitor that I use with my CT2B falcon. I tried with it. It is slow to warm up the screen, so when booting with it, I never see the "pretty" screen, but I think it is acting the same, since the little green light that comes on when things are working normally comes on for a second when booting in 060 mode. I have 2 different vga adaptors. When using the Atari adaptor, booting in 030 mode, on the 17 inch I get mostly white jagged lines across the screen that pulse on and off about 3 times per second. Same setup, in 060 mode I get white jaggies, spaced further apart, pulsing slower, about 1-2 times per second. With the dell monitor, no jaggies, just black. I posted on the DH site, where I was told that if I hold down the shift-alt-undo key, it will reset the falcon to factory settings. This is a bit hard for me to do, since I've recased this Falcon in a Wizztronics case with a DEKA keyboard adaptor. I only have a ps/2 keyboard, and the undo key isn't mapped properly. I tried 1 time to install the atari keyboard so I could do the control-alt-undo thing, but nothing different happened. (I have to move the power supply to plug in the keyboard.)
   So, I think I set the falcon to some incompatible mode for a VGA, perhaps tv? (no tv out, can't tell!) How exactly can I reset it to the "normal" boot resolution? If there is a particular key combination to hold down, does it happen at a particular point in the boot process? (If so, I'll have to guess, since I can't see where it is in that process.) Am I the dumbest assed Atari user you have ever seen post here? (I guess you don't really have to answer that, but go ahead if you must!)"

John Smith tells Wayne:

"If you have two different VGA adapters e.g "bugged" and "debugged" one try booting with bugged one and when booting is done change it for debugged one or vice versa. Use the monitor which works with CT2.
I had the same problem."

Mark Duckworth adds:

"If it works in 030 mode, what you want to do is.
A: download TOS 0.99g from aniplay.atari.org if you don't have it.
If you do, you're screwed

B: update the tos with the flash tool.

THEN do the control-alt-undo.

Without tos .99g it wont’ be clearing the flash of the ct60 which overrides tos nvram probably."

John Garone asks about a problem he’s having while copying files:

"My system hangs while trying to copy large files around 10 meg or more! This started after replacing one of two hard drives. It occurs when trying to copy from either of 2 CD drives, from either hard drive to each other or within either hard drive! I’ve checked ID #s, swapped out cables (total length is about 11 feet), reconfigured HDDriver and Extendos Gold, done sector tests on both hard drives and a memory test on the 14 meg RAM.

I believe termination is ok (older Seagate, last in chain, no jumper = terminated.....new Seagate, second in chain, no jumper selection or termination power from cable).

Physical order of devices:
C-LAB Falcon
Yamaha CD R/W CRW2200S
Seagate ST15230WC SUN 4.2g
Toshiba CDROM XM-5401TA3605
Seagate ST51080N 1g

Any Thoughts?"

Jim DeClercq tells John:

"Yes, thoughts. Have you done a web search on either Seagate part number? I have more than one ST32550W, and one of them was acting very strangely. Found that typing the part number into a search engine box revealed that many people had strange problems with that drive, and one fellow bought 12, and found that only 4 of them worked in his systems. That told me what was wrong, and what to do about it. Skipping a lot of steps, after finding those reports, I installed three jumpers on the top of that drive, connecting termpower to the terminators, to the network, and connecting network termpower to the drive, and now it works just fine, in the middle of the chain, and very thoroughly in the state some people would call terminated.

First do that web search. If you are the only one with a problem with a drive which is about the right size for a Unix system, that is not the problem. And, shorten those cables. Those drive should at least be in the same county. That could be all of your problem, or fix your problem.

And, block size might matter. There is Kobold, and there is tosfix, to break transfers up into sizes that do not cause problems. "

John now posts:

"After checking all that can be checked regarding hardware, termination, ID#s and cables, I booted with ICD and had no problem copying a 49 meg file from either of 2 CD drives to 2 hard drives or between hard drives but the system hangs if I boot with HDDriver 8.04 and try to copy a file over 10 meg! Same after reducing the system down to 1 hard drive and 1 CDROM. So, is there a bug in HDDriver 8.04 or am I not setting it right?"

Stephen Moss tells John:

"Even though you have stated otherwise I still believe that it is a cabling problem in that basically they are to long. When I tried using a 1 Metre extension cable with my HD on the floor I could copy floppies to it ok but copying 720K from the HD to a floppy would always result in the "Disk Damaged/Drive not connected" alert message. When I went back to the shorter cable cable (12-16 inch) that was part of the Link 97 adaptor everything was fine.
The reason why floppy to HD was ok is that the ST is relatively slow at reading data from floppy and transfers it out in smaller chunks, I cant remember how large these are but it is defined by TOS however it does not work the other way because IIRC HD Drive transfers as much data as will fit into the available RAM from where the ST then copies it in the smaller chunks to the floppy so HD to ST data transfers more data faster.

Now I know you will dismiss this because the longer cables worked with the ICD Driver but as Uwe stated HD Driver uses a fuller SCSI command set and the code may be more optimised than that of the ICD Driver, if either if these results in faster data transfer the extra capacitance of the longer cables will degregate the faster moving signals more that slower signal to the point where the recipient cannot tell if it is receiving a 1 or a 0.

You say you have checked the cables but not if you tried HD Driver with shorter cables, if you have not give it a go you might find it works."

John tells Stephen:

"I reduced the system down to a 6-foot cable to one hard drive with HDDriver! No other cables. Still the same!"

Brian Roland adds:

"I might be barking up the wrong tree here...
But I didn’t have much luck with HDDriver 8 on a Falcon either. In fact, version 8 doesn’t work with CuBase Audio at all.

I went back to version 7.93, which offers most of the same features as version 8...just less optimized, and run the CAFFIX patch, and so far, knock on wood, SCSI problems are gone.

This is on a CT2b with gobs of stuff on the SCSI BUS...wide SCSI III (with high bytes terminated), and narrow SCSI I and II (50 pin and 25pin cables) all mixed together. Okay, I admit when I’m doing serious audio projects I take out all the junk and use as short a cable as possible...but in normal day to day usage the chain is dangerously long...and so far so good.

The first thing I’d try however, is installing the CAFFIX.PRG from your HDUTIL disk. If that doesn’t do the trick, see if Uwe will send you 7.93."

Uwe Seimet tells Brian:

"This is a known issue, related to Cubase and the fact that Cubase accesses

to SCSI bus in ways not compliant to the SCSI standard. There is nothing one can do about it, like with any software (Cubase in this case) that is not maintained anymore."

Jason Davey asks about a graphics card for the TT:

"Can any one tell me if there are any VME display cards available for the TT and if there is which is has the best screen resolution (colours & pixel dimensions) and fastest redraw rate etc."

Lonny Pursell tells Jason:

"All such cards are out of production, except perhaps the one from Mario. I do not know the status of that card.

I have owned a cyrel sunrise, setup and such was a pain at the time. Also I had issues with certain programs incorrectly detecting the video mode. Got rid of it.

The nova cards work pretty good, but you end up with 2 drivers, the nova driver and nvdi or speedo if you want scalable fonts. Sold it.

Personally I recommend the Crazydots II card. Least amount of hassle, works with everything, and you only need nvdi v5 to drive it.
Also v2 of the card does 24bit, regardless of what others say without any add-on board. It will do 640x480 24bit, 800x600 16bit and something like 1024x768 256c on my TT. It’s also fully programmable, I actually bumped it up to 1152x896 or so in 256c mode.

The original Crazydots only does 256c max, and 16bit with some addon board, if you can even find the add on board anymore."

Mark Duckworth adds:

"The SuperNova card (Mach64) can do 1024x768x16 bit color. I have this one. The Matrix Coco can also do higher resolutions/colors but they tend to be a bit harder to find. I have a Matrix Moco/Coco upgrade card but it is non-functional. Lastly I have an AlberTT card. This card is more or less a rez expander, giving you 1024x768x16 colors. It’s not too bad of a card, but scrolling is painfully slow and the display isn’t too crisp.

I’d let go of the AlberTT if someone threw me $50USD. I know that’s too much for this card but I don’t really need to sell it. But if someone *really* wants one, it’s there. I would also sell the matrix card but I am completely troubled by how much to charge. If someone gets the specs for the card, fixing it is a matter of 6 wires and it’s a GOOD video card, but at the same time it’s in non-working condition so charging full price would be very unfair."

Well folks, have a happy, healthy and safe holiday. And again, please don’t drink and drive. The life you save may be MINE! <grin>

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Retro Gaming, Remembering Youth!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Fugitive Hunter!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Retro Games, Devices, Recall Electronic Youth

When Cindy Simmons and her husband get home from a hard day at the office, they cozy up and relax like many young couples - by bombing enemy ships on "River Raid" using their classic Atari video game console.

"It is just like being 11 years old again," said Simmons, 32, an on-air radio personality from Atlanta. "Except I didn’t have 30 games then - now I do."

High-tech gadgets like digital cameras top many holiday wish lists, but old-school items such as "Pac-Man" video games and vintage televisions are finding an audience with tech-savvy consumers yearning for nostalgia.

Rapid advances in computer technology have allowed consumer electronics makers to pack increasingly more power into smaller boxes, helping to grow the CE market to almost $100 billion.

But even "thirtysomething" shoppers - the first generation to grow up with personal "Walkman" music players and own a home version of "Space Invaders" - are overwhelmed when confronted with Sony Corp. PlayStation 2 and Microsoft Corp.’s Xbox consoles that also surf the Web and play DVDs, or pocket devices that can store 10,000 songs.

"Devices and games are getting more complex. The learning curve is not what it used to be and or you’re not as willing to spend the time to learn as you would years ago," analyst Danielle Levitas of research firm IDC said. "Also, every generation experiences nostalgia, reflecting on what they did in their free time when they were teen-agers."

The trend is most evident with video games. Teens today enjoy them primarily on living room consoles that can, for example, simulate with stunning three-dimensional precision, a World War II battle scene. A single game, packed with maps and myriad weaponry, can take hours to learn and weeks to complete.

By contrast, beloved games of late 1970s and early 1980s were no-brainers, where strategy meant little more than picking whether to chase and chomp the stationary picture of a strawberry or the red cone-shaped monster with the googly eyes.

"The essence of these games was that they didn't go on for 40 hours. You can just pick up and figure out what was going on fairly quickly and then play," said Keith Robinson, president of Intellivision Productions, which is also selling a version of its 1980s games for new game consoles.

At eBay Inc.'s online auction site, more than 43,000 vintage gaming items are being offered for sale, including the classic brand names Atari, Colecovision and Commodore. Gross merchandise sales - the value of goods sold via the site - for Commodore alone are up 61 percent for the last three months.

"This growth is related to the children of baby boomers wanting to recapture a piece of their youth in the early 1980s," eBay spokesman Hani Durzy said.

Intellivision this year is offering "Intellivision Lives!" for PS2 and Xbox, resurrecting long-forgotten titles like "Shark! Shark!" and "Space Armada." Its Intellivision 25 direct-to-TV controller lets users without a console play 25 games by plugging a game controller into their TV or VCR.

Similar game controller products are available from Atari, Activision and Namco, bringing "Dig Dug" and "Asteroids" from the era of Lionel Ritchie and Diane Keaton to that of Missy Elliott and Ben Affleck.

Each game controller looks almost exactly like the original joystick-and-single-button model - a relic compared to current models that often sport six buttons and two directional sticks.

"People identify with the original Atari 2600 joystick," said Genna Goldberg of JAKKS Pacific Inc., which makes the three joystick games. "For many it was the first video game system they had as a kid."

Search for Osama bin Laden comes to PlayStation in Fugitive Hunter

Add video gamers to the list of governments, special forces and soldiers hunting for Osama bin Laden.

When John Botti came up with the idea for a bounty hunter video game, he turned to the FBI's most wanted list for inspiration. That was before Sept. 11 but bin Laden was already No. 1 on the fugitive list. So Botti, the 36-year-old president and CEO of Black Ops Entertainment in Santa Monica, Calif., put him in Fugitive Hunter: War on Terror.

The PlayStation 2 title allows gamers to go after 11 terrorists, with the search for bin Laden in mountain caves on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border the game's final battle.

So far, it seems people like beating up on bin Laden.

"We didn't know how it would be taken," Botti said Tuesday. "But we didn't do anything that was inappropriate and I think people like to vent their frustration out on him."

You have to work your way up to bin Laden. First you take on murderers and bank robbers from Miami, a militia group in Utah, a drug cartel in the Caribbean and al-Qaida operatives in France.

Botti, whose twin brother Will is Black Ops' video-president of software development, came up with the idea for the game after graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1990. He moved to California and was living in a tough neighbourhood at the time.

"The idea kind of came from me actually living in that environment, where there were police chases and helicopters and police dogs and gang busts all the time. Every day," he said from California. "It was a very different experience from growing up in a suburban section of New York."

Botti, who wrote computer games as a hobby while growing up, had hoped to get into the film business after leaving MIT. But when times were lean, he turned back to video games and eventually formed Black Ops in 1994.

Pre-production of Fugitive Hunter started in 1999 and when a team from Blacks Ops finished a James Bond title, Botti put them on the new game in 2000.

So far Fugitive Hunter has done "fairly well," said Botti. "There's a lot of competition right now."

But Black Ops is already pondering a sequel and Botti, proud of the game, finds himself still playing it.

"It's not a game that has a $20-million production budget, but it is a game that has some cool weapons," he said. "I just get a kick out of blowing terrorists away."

Current events caught up with the game designers as they worked on Fugitive Hunter.

Bin Laden was No. 1 on the most wanted list, but was hardly in the public eye at that time. Still a publisher picked up the game and "then Sept. 11 hit."

"We actually restructured our game a little bit to remove the New York levels and some of the other things, but we kept the al-Qaida and Afghanistan stuff."

He also sounded out New Yorkers about the game.

"I'm from New York. I'm the last person to do anything defamatory or insulting to my friends and family that live and work in New York," Botti said. "Most of my good friends from MIT or high school work in Wall Street where all that stuff went down."

Today bin Laden is still on the wanted list, with an FBI bounty of $25 million US.

Botti even spoke to the FBI during game production, to make sure Fugitive Hunter would not cause waves by including an al-Qaida component. The bureau had no objections, noting the terrorists had a lot more to worry about than a video game.

Botti compares the production of Fugitive Hunter to that of an independent

film. Money was tight so, with an eye to the bottom line, Botti looked for ways to cut costs during game production.

Black Ops' system administrator, a big man, provided the body for bank robber Casey Webber. Other employee were used for their voices.

But Botti did not skimp when it came to the game's narrator. He got Will Lyman, the voice of PBS's Nova and Frontline.

Lyman's instantly recognizable voice - he also stars in the ABC series Threat Matrix - lends the game valuable authenticity.

One criticism Botti has got is that the game's final hand-to-hand battle with bin Laden is unrealistic. According to the FBI's most wanted terrorist list, bin Laden walks with a cane.

"It's a game," Botti countered. "If we just made the guy come out with a cane, like when they captured Saddam Hussein it's not that eventful."

Bring down bin Laden and you get to cuff him, then boot him into a helicopter waiting to whisk him back to justice.

Black Ops, which also shoots commercials and is looking at some movie projects, has sold more than 5.5 million copies of its video games. It has created some 18 titles including the boxing game Knockout Kings, James Bond's The World is Not Enough and Tomorrow Never Dies, and basketball's Street Hoops.

Tomorrow Never Dies, for PlayStation 1, sold some three million copies alone.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Bush Signs First National Anti-Spam Bill Into Law

President Bush signed the first national anti-spam bill into law on Tuesday, outlawing some of the most annoying forms of junk e-mail and setting jail time and multimillion dollar fines for violators.

The law also lays the groundwork for a "Do Not Spam" registry similar to the "Do Not Call" anti-telemarketing list that went into effect earlier this year.

Bush's signing marks the final legislative step in a six-year struggle to curb the unsolicited commercial offers that threaten to overwhelm the e-mail system.

But the law is unlikely to provide much of a Christmas present, at least this year.

Experts say it will not immediately stop the torrent of unwelcome e-mails touting unbelievably low mortgage rates, get-rich-quick schemes and sexual enhancement offers that now account for more than half of all e-mail traffic.

Skeptics say it will only encourage businesses to send out more unwanted e-mail, as the new law allows marketers to send messages to anyone with an e-mail address as long as they identify themselves clearly and honor consumer requests to leave them alone.

Supporters say the law sets a helpful framework for acceptable e-mail practices, but acknowledge it will need to be enforced aggressively to have any impact.

"This will help address the problems associated with the rapid growth and abuse of spam by establishing a framework of technological, administrative, civil and criminal tools and by providing consumers with the options to reduce unwanted e-mail," said White House spokesman Scott McClellan.

The new law requires pornographic e-mail to be clearly labeled, and commercial "text messages" to cell phones will be prohibited unless users expressly permit them.

It encourages but does not require the Federal Trade Commission to allow Internet users who don’t want to receive any unsolicited marketing to place their e-mail addresses on a list that marketers would be required to check. FTC officials have said on several occasions that a do-not-spam registry would be difficult to enforce.

The law will override some tougher state laws, such as one in California that would prevent all unsolicited commercial e-mail, and will prohibit consumer lawsuits.

Internet marketers have begun to feel the heat as the skyrocketing volumes of spam have strained computer networks and outraged consumers.

Prosecutors in New York and Virginia have used state laws to arrest a handful of spammers, and large Internet service providers like Time Warner Inc.’s America Online and EarthLink Inc. have sued dozens more for damages.

Microsoft Corp. and New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer are expected to announce another anti-spam action on Thursday.

At the national level, the Federal Trade Commission has used deceptive-business laws to go after spammers, though settlements generally involve promises to avoid spamming in the future rather than fines or jail time.

Large Internet service providers and marketing and technology trade groups praised the new law, though many said it would need to be coupled with better filtering methods.

Forrester Research analyst Jim Nail said the law would have little effect as spammers would simply move offshore and come up with new ways to evade filters and cover their tracks. A better solution would be to force all e-mail users to pay a fraction of a penny for each message sent, as a way to discourage indiscriminate mass e-mailings, he said.

Civil-liberties advocate Ari Schwartz said the bill would likely make it

easier for Internet service providers and prosecutors to go after spammers, though it was not without flaws.

Spammers who already violate existing fraud laws are unlikely to honor opt-out requests, and the anti-pornography provisions could prove difficult to enforce, said Schwartz, an associate director at the Washington-based Center for Democracy and Technology.

And by preventing individual lawsuits, Congress shut the door on an effective way to harness consumer anti-spam sentiment, he said.

"There shouldn't be extremely high expectations for this law," he said.

Microsoft, New York State Sue E-Mail Spammers

Microsoft Corp. and New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer on Thursday sued a group of e-mail marketers they said were responsible for sending billions of fraudulent spam messages.

Microsoft, the world's largest software company, said the defendants in the civil lawsuits include New York marketing firm Synergy6 Inc. and Scott Richter, who runs Westminster, Colorado-based Optinrealbig.com LLC.

Spitzer, known for his aggressive pursuit of corporate fraud in recent years, has previously brought three lawsuits against so-called spammers, those who send unsolicited commercial e-mails.

The lawsuit, filed by Microsoft in King County Superior Court in Washington state and jointly with the New York attorney general in New York State Supreme Court in Manhattan, claims the spammers violated New York and Washington state laws by offering free goods in exchange for personal information, using false sender names, false subject lines, misleading sender e-mail addresses and falsified transmission information.

"We believe Scott Richter is clearing several million dollars a month in profits," Spitzer told reporters at a news conference in New York, adding that the joint legal action was aimed at driving Richter and Synergy6 into bankruptcy.

Spitzer said Richter was responsible for sending more than 250 million spam messages per day and profited handsomely from his business.

Richter rejected the legal claims by the New York attorney general and Microsoft, but did not deny the profitability of his enterprise nor the volume of advertising messages.

"We intend to fight it (the lawsuit) and it's not going to affect us," Richter said. "It's going to take an army" of lawyers.

The New York attorney general for the first time teamed up with the private sector to enhance its subpoena power with technology tools from Microsoft, Spitzer said.

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft, which has gone on the offensive against e-mail advertising touting everything from get-rich-quick schemes to pornographic Web sites, is developing anti-spam technology and waging legal warfare against spammers.

The company, whose MSN Internet and Hotmail e-mail services have millions of subscribers around the world, has said spammers clog its networks with traffic and hurt consumers with e-mails that appeared to come from a foreign government's defense ministry, a hospital or elementary schools, among other purported senders.

Microsoft said 2.4 billion, or 80 percent of the e-mails its users receive every day, are spam. Research firm IDC estimates 7.3 billion junk e-mails are sent daily.

Spam will cost American companies more than $10 billion in 2003, according to consulting firm Ferris Research. Albert Decker, director of security and privacy services at computer consultant EDS Corp., said the cost savings from reducing spam will be in the billions, simply from the improvement in productivity and reduction of processing work.

After investigating the messages, Microsoft was able to determine who sent them, Microsoft General Counsel Brad Smith said.

"The finger is now pointing at them," he said. "There is no doubt in our minds that the lawsuits today are being filed against the right people."

Microsoft has admitted that legal action alone won't stem the flood of spam piling up in inboxes every day.

Microsoft said it filed five additional lawsuits against other spammers who allegedly used the same transmission path in New York that originally led investigators to Richter and the spam network.

Verizon Communications and Microsoft have previously brought suits against the world's largest spammers.

"If these people have any money left ... we will be happy to pursue the remainder," Smith said. "We need to send a strong message that this is illegal and doesn't pay."

Representatives from Synergy6 were not immediately available for comment.

On Tuesday, President Bush signed into law the first national anti-spam bill, which bans some forms of junk e-mail and sets jail time and multimillion-dollar fines for violators.

But experts say the new law is not likely to stop the torrent of unsolicited commercial e-mail, because it lets businesses send messages to anyone with an e-mail address as long as they identify themselves clearly and honor consumer requests to leave them alone.

In addition, some are concerned that businesses may outsource the work to people outside the United States to escape penalties. Spitzer acknowledged any such move would make his work harder, but told Reuters he is confident the obstacles will be overcome, "no matter if it's someone pushing the button in India, Egypt or Alabama.

"The fact that someone else pushes the button doesn't eliminate the liability of the person who is trying to make this a business," he added.

Dutch Court Throws Out Attempt to Control Kazaa

The Dutch supreme court on Friday threw out an attempt by a music copyright agency to put controls on popular Internet file-swapping software system Kazaa, a ruling the music industry attacked as flawed.

The decision is a fresh blow to the media industry, which has fought to shut down file-sharing networks they say have created a massive black-market trade in free music, films and video games on the Internet.

"The victory by Kazaa creates an important precedent for the legality of peer-to-peer software, both in the European Union as elsewhere," Kazaa's lawyers Bird & Bird said in a statement.

The decision by the Dutch court, the highest European body yet to rule on file-sharing software, means that the developers of the software cannot be held liable for how individuals use it. It does not address issues over individuals' use of such networks.

The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), the music trade group representing independent and major music labels including Warner Music, Sony Music, BMG, EMI and Universal Music, criticized the ruling as "one-sided" and vowed to continue its legal crusade elsewhere.

"Today's ruling on Kazaa by the Dutch Supreme Court is a flawed judgment, but still leaves no doubt that the vast majority of people who are using file-swapping services like Kazaa are acting illegally - whatever country they are in," the group said in a statement.

The music industry in the United States, feeling the pinch of successive years of declining CD sales, has begun suing individual downloaders, many of whom are Kazaa users. The IFPI has said a similar legal campaign could be launched in Europe.

The Supreme Court rejected demands by Buma Stemra, the Dutch royalties collection society, that distribution of Kazaa cease and that future versions be modified so that copyrighted materials cannot be exchanged over the network, lawyers representing Kazaa said.

Kazaa and other new breed peer-to-peer networks have argued they have no centralised servers and therefore cannot control what is exchanged by their users, a defense the IFPI and other media organizations challenge.

The IFPI maintained Kazaa could be modified to filter out copyrighted works. They also demanded the company warn Kazaa users that unauthorized distribution of such materials was illegal.

The supreme court upheld a March 2002 ruling in which an appeals court ruled in favor of Fasttrack, the Amsterdam-based firm that developed Kazaa. Fasttrack later sold the technology to Sharman Networks Ltd of Australia.

The media industry has launched a similar suit in the United States against Sharman, which many see as the crucial legal showdown for determining the legal future of file-sharing.

Kazaa has become the undisputed king of file-sharing networks. In October, Kazaa registered over 17.5 million European and American users, according to Internet measurement firm Nielsen//NetRatings.

In the Netherlands alone there are 3.6 million users.

"This is a historic victory for the Internet and consumers," Niklas Zennstroem and Janus Friis, the founders of Kazaa, were quoted in the lawyer's statement as saying.

Court: Net Music Subpoenas Not Allowed

In a surprise setback for the beleaguered recording industry, a U.S. appeals court ruled that record labels cannot force Internet service providers to name customers who illegally copy music online.

Existing copyright law does not allow record labels to force Internet providers to turn over customer names without a formal lawsuit, the court said, adding the industry's legal argument "borders upon the silly."

The decision complicates the recording industry's efforts to stamp out the online traffic in copyrighted songs over "peer to peer" networks like Kazaa, a practice the industry says has contributed to plummeting CD sales.

The Recording Industry Association of America has reached out-of-court settlements with at least 220 Internet users after tracking their activity online and forcing Internet providers to turn over their names.

The trade group will continue to file lawsuits against those it suspects of copyright violations but will not be able to warn them beforehand, an RIAA official said in a statement.

"Regardless of this decision, we will continue to defend our rights online on behalf of artists, songwriters and countless others involved in bringing music to the public," said RIAA President Cary Sherman.

Verizon Communications challenged the practice last year, arguing that a 1998 copyright law does not require it to turn over customer names without a lawsuit.

A lower court earlier this year upheld the recording industry's tactics, and the appeals court declined to halt the practice while it considered the case.

But in a strongly worded ruling, the appeals court sided with Verizon, saying a 1998 law does not give copyright holders the ability to subpoena customer names from Internet providers without first filing a formal lawsuit.

"In sum, we agree with Verizon that (the law) does not by its terms authorize the subpoenas issued here," Chief Judge Douglas Ginsburg wrote.

The recording industry's "digital online fishing expedition" violates customer privacy and due-process rights, said Sarah Deutsch, a Verizon vice president and associate general counsel.

"Verizon is definitely interested in working with all of the copyright community in finding ways to stop piracy, but we have to do it in a way that supports the balance between users' rights and the rights of the copyright holder," Deutsch said.

The RIAA did not provide immediate comment.

An independent copyright expert said the recording industry will have to meet a higher legal standard before filing lawsuits against users in the future - which could avoid further public-relations embarrassments such as the 12-year-old girl who was one of the first to be sued.

"In some ways it's kind of a mixed blessing for the recording industry, because they're not going to end up having the grandma in Massachusetts who is accused of having Linkin Park and hip-hop music on her computer," said Gigi Sohn, executive director of Public Knowledge, a Washington think tank.

RIAA members include Vivendi's Universal Universal Music Group; Time Warner Inc.'s Warner Music; EMI Group Plc; Sony Corp's Sony Music; and Bertelsmann AG's BMG.

Internet Sales Tax Effort on Hold for Now

The debate over whether the Internet should remain a huge tax-free marketplace for U.S. shoppers probably will not be resolved in 2004, according to policymakers and experts who cited the upcoming presidential election as a political disincentive to action as well as stubborn resistance by some lawmakers and business interests to any effort to tax electronic commerce.

That prospect would be a setback for a quiet but dogged effort led by state officials and some of their allies in the business community to get Congress to authorize state governments to collect taxes on their residents' Internet purchases.

"I would be stunned if there was a vote on this in a presidential election year," said Bartlett Cleland, associate general counsel for the Information Technology Association of America, a high-tech lobbying group that has lobbied against the plan.

The co-chairman of the states' working group on Internet sales taxes agreed. "I don't think anyone doubts this is going to be a tough sell in Congress during an election year," said Diane Hardt of the Streamlined Sales Tax Project.

Nevertheless, Hardt's group is working overtime to persuade more retailers to voluntarily collect taxes from their customers in every state that has a sales tax.

"There are huge financial incentives for the states to get this done, and the states would like to get this money as soon as possible," she said.

Some state legislatures have already voted to modify their sales tax codes to accommodate the plan, but the endgame almost certainly will play out in the halls of Congress. Reps. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) and William Delahunt (D-Mass.) introduced a bill earlier this year that would give the congressional go-ahead to the sales tax plan, but that proposal will die if it does not get a vote before the end of 2004.

The stakes - by some estimates - are high. An oft-cited 2001 study by two professors at the University of Tennessee said that the amount of uncollected taxes on e-commerce will grow to $45 billion by 2006.

States have long argued that it is unfair that they can't tax all Internet commerce, especially when sales taxes are a principal way to ensure that business activities support vital local services like education and transportation services.

Collecting taxes on online retail transactions is equally appealing to the so-called "bricks-and-mortar" business community, which sees the Internet's tax-free status as a powerful force discouraging shoppers from heading out to physical stores. Even online retailers like Wal-Mart, Target and Amazon.com, which initially balked at the idea, have started to support it this year. Wal-Mart and Target, which maintain both physical and online stores, are particularly anxious to eliminate any state claims on previously unpaid taxes on online sales.

On the other side of the debate are groups like the ITAA and the Microsoft-funded Association for Competitive Technology, which oppose the plan as currently written. These groups say they support simpler state taxes but don't want to see the Internet economy sucked dry by over-taxation.

Rep. Istook remains optimistic that his bill will pass, said spokeswoman Micah Swafford. She noted a 2001 vote in which the House of Representatives voted by a 2-1 margin in favor of a nonbinding resolution supporting the online sales tax plan.

But given the strong anti-tax sentiment among the House Republican leadership, some proponents of the plan are looking to the Senate for a better reception, said Maureen Riehl, vice president of state and industry relations for the National Retail Federation.

"There's just not as much of an anti-tax crowd in the Senate. They don't see this issue like many House Republicans do. The senators seem to understand that what we're talking about here is collection, not a new tax," Riehl said.

Even though the House leadership under Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) is opposed to the plan, many of its ardent supporters are Republicans who have practically built their careers as anti-tax hawks. Istook, the lead sponsor of the House bill, is well known for being tough on taxes, as is Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), sponsor of a similar bill in the Senate. Other conservative Republicans backing the state effort include Reps. Ray LaHood (Ill.) and Spencer Bachus (Ala.), and Sens. Chuck Hagel (Neb.) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (Texas).

For these lawmakers, online sales taxes are a matter best left to the states.

"Some of those are very staunch states'-righters," said Richard Prem, director of global Internet taxation for Amazon.com. "When people look at these issues, they realize that there's a more fundamental issue than just taxes on the line here."

Two of the senators currently supporting the states on issues of taxing Internet access and sales - George Voinovich (R-Ohio) and Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) - are former governors and remember the difficulties they faced in handling tight state budgets, Prem noted.

Some lawmakers are sympathetic to the complaints of large, established retailers in the offline world that say it is unfair for their online

counterparts to get a tax break, said Gary Gudmundson, spokesman for the Ohio Department of Taxation. "Traditional retailers provide jobs, they pay taxes ... How can you ignore them? Not to mention that they're much bigger players financially."

At this time, 45 states require citizens to pay sales taxes on their purchases, even if they're made online or in another state. Few online businesses collect those taxes because there's no way for other states to force them to hand over the money. That stems from a 1992 Supreme Court decision that says businesses can't be forced to collect taxes for a different state than the one they're located in. In that ruling, the court said Congress can authorize the collection of Internet and catalogue sales taxes across state lines, but only if the states simplify their tax systems first.

To do that, the Streamlined Sales Tax Coalition must develop a system for the states to get their dues while making sure that smaller online businesses are not swamped by having to comply with thousands of different tax jurisdictions.

If some technology lobbyists have their way, the Internet sales tax effort will fade away.

NetChoice, a lobbying group that represents online auction giant eBay and travel Web site Orbitz, said that the plan's supporters have not done enough to answer difficult questions about how it will work, including how to certify tax software vendors, educating online merchants and how the states will exchange revenue.

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA), meanwhile, said in a June study that the amount of money states could get from Internet sales taxes might be far less than they claim - just $3.2 billion by 2006.

The states might win more support from the business community if they cut a range of other corporate income and franchise taxes, said Stephen Kranz, tax counsel for the Council on State Taxation.

"That could very well be the play that earns the states the momentum they need to get their tax plan approved," Kranz said.

Neil Osten, director of telecommunications and commerce at the National Conference of State Legislatures, said some states fear that additional tax breaks could cancel out any increased tax revenues collected on Internet sales.

Riehl of the National Retail Federation said that one possibility under consideration is combining the sales tax plan with a proposal to limit how states charge business activity taxes.

Business activity taxes include franchise taxes and business license taxes that usually affect only the companies that are established in the local area where the tax is applied. Some states have angered companies by seeking to expand the taxes to more kinds of corporate activity including sending salespeople or delivery trucks that cross state lines for even just a few minutes or hours.

House lawmakers introduced legislation that would bar states and localities from levying businesses activity taxes against out-of-state companies unless the company has a store, shipping center or other property physically located in the taxing jurisdiction.

Riehl said that the idea is a good one but has no guarantee of success.

"We will know by the first of March whether this thing will get the traction it needs next year or not."

Linux 2.6 Arrives

Linus Torvalds released the long-awaited Linux 2.6 on Wednesday night, although it won't be adopted by major Linux distributors any time soon.

The release, which Torvalds announced to the Linux-kernel mailing list, comes almost three years after the last Linux release, 2.4, in January 2001. (Late beta versions of the 2.6 kernel have been available since July.) The source code is now available at The Linux Kernel Archive.

In his announcement note, Torvalds wrote, "This should not be a big surprise to anybody - since we've been building up to it for a long time now, and for the last few weeks I haven't accepted any patches except for what amounts to fairly obvious one-liners."

Linux 2.6 isn't flawless. "Some known issues were not considered to be release-critical, and a number of them have pending fixes," Torvalds said. "Generally, they just didn't have the kind of verification yet where I was willing to take them in order to make sure a fair 2.6.0 release."

Torvalds will continue to track the Linux 2.6 tree, but now that Linux 2.6 is a stable release, he will begin to turn his attention to the next version of Linux, 2.7, and Andrew Morton will take over as the maintainer of Linux 2.6.

Commercial releases of the 2.6 kernel by major Linux distributors still remain months away. Red Hat Inc. won't be adding 2.6 until the Red Hat Enterprise Linux 4 product line comes out in 2005. SuSE Linux AG will include 2.6 sooner with its summer 2004 release of SuSE Linux Enterprise Server 9.

This new version of Linux brings several improvements for enterprise users. It now supports up to 32 processors, 64GB of memory with 32-bit processors, and new file systems such as IBM's Journaling File System (JFS) and Silicon Graphics Inc.'s XFS. Version 2.6 also supports Non-Uniform Memory Access (NUMA), which will aid it on advanced multiprocessing systems.

Linux 2.6 also includes fundamental improvements in how it deals with devices, which should make it easier for OEMs to deploy Linux on their computers. In addition, this Linux has improvements to almost every element of the operating system, from system processing to networking to expanded support for embedded devices. For more technical details on Linux 2.6's changes, see IBM's "Towards Linux 2.6" white paper and Joseph Pranevich's "The Wonderful World of Linux 2.6."

Cayam Worm Angles For eBay Account Info

Another phishing expedition appeared on the Internet Thursday, this one

dubbed W32/Cayam and targeting eBay users.

Cayam, which poses as a message from eBay with a subject heading reading 'Verify your eBay account information,' actually contains a worm in its attached file. When that attachment is opened, the worm displays several legitimate-looking screens that ask the user to enter his eBay user ID and password, then complete a seemingly official form.

The form request a whole host of personal and financial information, including the user's Social Security number, credit card information, and bank checking account number.

The worm propagates by lifting addresses out of the target PC's copy of Microsoft Outlook and e-mailing copies of itself to others, and can also spread via the peer-to-peer Kazaa and eMule networks.

Phishing, a term used to describe malicious e-mail that pose as legitimate messages from major corporations - usually with the intent to trick the recipient into disclosing personal or financial information - have been more aggressive this year than ever before, according to mail filtering firm Postini, which tagged an increase in the potentially lucrative practice as one of its top ten predictions for 2004.

Earlier this month, the Mimail series created a stir by trying to fool users into giving up account information for eBay's electronic payment service, PayPal.

Spam Slayer: 2003 Spam Awards

Seven billion commercial e-mail messages crossed the Internet daily in 2003, easily breaking all previous spam records. And despite new laws, and ISP suits against spammers, the amount of junk e-mail transmitted daily is forecast to hit 9 billion in 2004, according to antispam software maker Brightmail. Today about half of all e-mail is spam, the firm reports.

For those of you keeping score in the spam wars, let's take a look back at the spam-busting year of 2003 and hand out a few Spam Slayer awards.

Worst Worm

The Sobig e-mail worm that clogged in-boxes in August was the most prolific virus of 2003, according to a top ten list of viruses published by antivirus software vendor Sophos. The UK-based firm says the Sobig worm accounted for almost 20 percent of the virus reports it got this year. Coming in second was the Blaster worm, with 15 percent.

Fastest Worm

Sobig was not only the most prolific, but spam-busting firm Postini says it was also the most nimble worm of 2003. On one dark day, Postini tracked the Sobig worm as infecting 4.5 percent of all e-mail that the service had filtered. That was a 2000 percent up-tick from Postini's routine e-mail infection rate of 0.3 percent.

Most Common Pitches

The junk e-mail equivalent to death and taxes are pitches for

pharmaceutical supplements, male body part enlargement, Viagra, sexually explicit porn, scams, and mortgages. According to Postini these categories are the most common spam subjects.

Most Annoying Spam

Perhaps it’s a no-brainer, but for posterity, the winners are: spam related to pharmaceutical supplements, male body part enlargement, Viagra, sexually explicit porn, scams, and mortgages.

Energizer Bunny Award

The 2003 spam message that most resembles the energetic rabbit was an Iraqi variation of the familiar Nigerian Scam 419. That e-mail hoax, which has been making the rounds for years, involves an alleged plea for assistance getting cash out of a country under siege - for a generous cut.

In the updated version, Eng Farouk Al-Bashar, allegedly the oldest son of an oil-rich Iraqi family, pleads for help. The e-mail asks for assistance in transporting $12.5 million in cash from a Baghdad vault. For your trouble you get 10 percent, or a negotiated amount. Yeah, right!

Best Spam Scam Newcomer

The Mimail e-mail worm easily wins this title. Mimail variants infect PCs with a payload containing instructions to launch distributed denial of service attacks against a number of antispam and e-commerce Web sites.

Antispam firms say this devilishly ingenious way to thwart their efforts will likely grow in 2004.

Biggest Defeat

Three leading antispam sites that hosted spammer blacklists were shut down in August after becoming victims of distributed denial of service attacks. It’s believed spammers launched the attacks using the Sobig worm.

The targeted sites were Osirusoft, Spam Prevention Early Warning System, and the Spam Open Relay and Blocking System. All were intermittently inaccessible; and, according to some online discussion forums, Osirusoft has shut down permanently.

Spamiest Day

February 15 was the busiest day of 2003 for spam, according to spam-filterer Postini. That day, 82.4 percent of all the e-mail it filtered for its customers was spam, Postini representatives say. Overall, however, October was the spamiest month, the company reports.

Lawyers to Love

In August, EarthLink filed lawsuits against two unsolicited commercial e-mail rings with operations in the United States and Canada, accusing them of sending spam that has cost the ISP millions. The ISP wants to recover an estimated $5 million in lost employee productivity and Internet bandwidth. That was the cost of managing more than 250 million e-mail messages sent from e-mail addresses on its network, according to EarthLink.

Shortest-Lived Spam Law

California took a stand against spam e-mail in September, approving some of the toughest antispam legislation in the nation. The new law would prohibit anyone from sending unsolicited commercial e-mail advertisements to a California e-mail address.

The new law is to take effect in January. Meanwhile, Congress has taken a stand that supplants California's measure. The federal Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing (CAN-SPAM) Act was approved in December. It is expected to get President George W. Bush's signature any day now, and will take effect in the summer.

The federal legislation requires unsolicited e-mail messages to include a mechanism that allows recipients to indicate they do not want future mailings. It also orders the Federal Trade Commission to offer within six months a plan to establish a national do-not-spam list, similar to the national do-not-call telemarketing list now in effect.

What Took You So Long?

The FTC aired concerns in November over exploitation of a Microsoft Windows service. The Windows Messenger Service is intended for network administrators to send notices to users, but it's being usurped by third parties to send pop-up spam.

In October, Microsoft said it will disable the Messenger Service on Windows XP machines with the release of Windows XP Service Pack 2, expected to ship in the first half of 2004.

Crowning the Spam King

Scott Richter is the Internet's poster boy for spam. Richter is chief executive of OptInRealBig.com, an $18-million-a-year business that sends out zillions of e-mail messages every day hawking adult porn, Viagra, and mortgages.

Richter says he sends out 80 million e-mail advertisements daily. He endorses curbing spam and creating an industry code of ethics. He is president of the E-Mail Marketing Association, a group that says it wants to work with the FTC to help stop spam and build consumer trust. According to the EMA Web site, the code of ethics has been "coming soon" since I first checked in September.

People's Choice: Best Free Spam Filter

You spoke and I heard you. I've gotten many glowing reviews of the spam filter SpamBayes. Indeed, I like it too - and you can't beat the price.

What makes the program unique is that SpamBayes doesn't use predetermined spam definitions. Rather, it constantly evolves by scanning your in-box to build custom definitions.

Charity Begins Online with Internet 'Givelist'

Do you really need another sweater?

If the answer is no, but if people keep asking what you want for the holidays, you might consider a Web site meant to meld charity and online

shopping.

The U.S.-based site, www.whatgoesaround.org, offers a vast smorgasbord of 900,000 non-profit groups, but it is not just a clearinghouse. It’s a place where users - so far it is targeting Americans - can register their charity preferences.

So when your grandmother wonders what you might like for the holidays, you won’t have to settle for another sweater - you can point her to the Web site and your personal "givelist" of preferred charities.

And if you can’t decide what to give Grandma but she hasn’t figured out how to use the site, you can donate to a non-profit group you choose in her honor.

Whatgoesaround.org, named in a nod to the expression "What goes around, comes around," is the brainchild of marketing expert Sylvia Stein and composer-lyricist Holly Gewandter.

Billing itself as "a new non-profit organization that’s revolutionizing giving in America," the site went live on Nov. 12, and by Wednesday had channeled more than $16,000 to U.S.-based non-profit organizations and the U.S. arms of such international organizations as Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders (news - web sites).

More than 1,800 Americans have registered on the site.

"A lot of gift-giving is forced, I call it gift fatigue," Stein said by telephone from New York. "This is for the 50-year-old who doesn’t want to write 50 thank you notes for 50 gag gifts about turning 50."

The site aims to remove some of the rampant materialism from giving, not just at the holidays, but at other occasions where presents of money are customary, such as weddings, bar mitzvahs and memorials for the dead.

It’s not supposed to feel like a traditional charitable donation, Gewandter said in a telephone interview. It’s supposed to feel more like shopping.

"Culturally, Americans have developed this incredible culture of shopping, it’s become entertainment, it’s become a major activity, a favorite pastime, but we’re all drowning in stuff," she said. "People want to do good but it’s a very complicated mix, and we started thinking, what if we could create this site as a shopping site, not as a charity site."

Those who want to use the site must register personal information, including an e-mail address, and then select charities from the site’s list, either by issue, name or locality.

Children have their own section on the site, and in addition to listing favorite charities, kids can ask for donations to a "changejar" for later giving.

Stein said e-mail has been overwhelmingly positive, and provided one missive that summed up the site’s appeal to "everyday philanthropists."

"I talked it over with my fiance... and we came up with a plan," the e-mail read. "We’ll both set up gift lists and donate to each other for Christmas. That way, when people ask us what we got each other, we can tell them about the site and they might use it in the future. A while ago, we agreed to exchange nothing but stockings filled with small items, since we both have

way too much stuff."

Gewandter said she hoped for a side benefit from the site: a reduction in direct-mail charity donation requests.

N.Y. Uses EBay to Sell Surplus Property

New York state has been quietly selling surplus items for more than a year through the highly successful online auction house eBay, officials said Tuesday.

"You would be amazed at what people will buy. It’s been great," said Jennifer Meicht, a spokeswoman for New York state’s Office of General Services.

Using the seller name "nyssurplus-albany," the state OGS is currently peddling a host of items including eight new Goodyear tires and a bunch of storage lockers.

"We started as an experiment, selling some surplus property and, based on our initial success, we’ve been slowly adding more items," Meicht told the New York Post, which first reported on the eBay sales in its Tuesday editions.

OGS sales on eBay have already earned the state almost $300,000 on hundreds of items, she said.

Chris Donlay, a spokesman for eBay, said New York is one of at least 14 states that are making use of the online auction service to sell surplus property, unclaimed assets and the like.

"The U.S. Post Office also sells undeliverable items" on eBay, Donlay said.

In addition to New York, Donlay said other states using eBay services include California, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

The eBay spokesman said about 86 million buyers and sellers use the service worldwide.

"It’s possible to get some great bargains now during the holiday season," said the OGS’s Meicht.

As of late Tuesday morning, the lot of eight Goodyear Eagle RS-A tires, size P225/70R15, had been bid up to $511. The auction on the tires was to end Wednesday morning.

According to eBay buyers, dealing with New York’s OGS is generally a good experience. The state has a positive feedback rating of 98.8 percent. OGS registered as a seller with eBay in January of last year, according to the state’s eBay listing, but Meicht said OGS’ selling didn’t begin until October of last year.

The OGS spokeswoman said the Internet selling saves the state administrative costs over its live auctions and "has opened up a larger market for us."

"We're getting rid of things that in the past we have had to simply throw away ... (and) we're getting great prices," Meicht said.

The OGS spokeswoman said eBay buyers have bought everything from a cotton candy machine to cobblestones from the state.

Meicht said most of the items sold by the state have been office equipment. She said a real surprise was that OGS is now getting up to $100 each for used gray metal desks that it used to have to junk.

"We even sold an old canoe," she added. "It came without paddles."

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